

Minutes of July 3, 2007 meeting

Present: Chuck Bolton, Melanie Gordon, Chris Hague, Ruth Jones, Michael Koski, George Malette, Ian McSweeney, Dave Trumble

Meeting called to order at 5:05, Chuck Bolton chair.

The minutes of June 19, 2007 were amended as follows:

Paragraph 3 amended to correct spelling of "Trumble."

Paragraph 4 the last sentence amended to add "...to see if agriculture was an appropriate use and if so whether the town might approach future easement holders to include agriculture in the easement."

Paragraph 6 amended to read "Trumble suggested five points. Gordon said the committee needed to educate the community..."

Paragraph 7 amended to read "Ruth Jones referred to "Is Your Town Planning a Future for Agriculture?"

Added after paragraph 9 : There was some discussion about the name of the committee and that the original, Farmland Preservation Committee (FPC) was more simple and easier to remember.

Amend July 2 at 5:30 PM to July 3 at 5 PM.

All amendments unanimously approved.

Chuck Bolton said that as long as the committee meets twice a month, he'd like to run the meetings for an hour.

Dave Trumble said that he had emailed Chris Hague a copy of easement language the Piscataquog Watershed Association uses as a template. In simple language, it authorizes farming. Only under very rare circumstances would an easement not include agricultural easement language. Bolton then wanted to know who farms the land once an easement is in place and farming is in the easement language. Trumble said the easement allows farming when or if someone wants to farm it. He volunteered to write easement language that refers specifically to farming. Another question asked about easement language was whether farming was allowed when not specified in an easement.

The committee said it wants to work with a variety of local easement holders, the Open Space Committee and the Conservation Commission.

A lengthy discussion of soils maps of Weare followed. Two maps were compared, one from N.H. Granit Data Mappers and one from the Soil Survey of Hillsborough County. Ian McSweeney had an overlay of tax map properties on the Granit map, which was color coded but had fewer soils classifications than the black and white Hillsborough County map. The first point of discussion was about which soils classifications to target. Melanie Gordon asked if the committee was planning to look at soils of statewide or local importance in addition to prime soils. The committee agreed that protecting prime soils is important, but that any existing agriculture on less desirable soils would merit protection also, and that classification on a map should be supplemented with "ground truth" by looking at specific pieces of land. Trumble said the right to farm should also be protected.

Part of the confusion in understanding the two maps came from the terminology on the Hillsborough County map, which shows 60 soils classifications, and uses different terminology from other maps. The committee wanted to know how the Granit map derived its categories. It did not have the "prime farm land" category shown on the Hillsborough County map. Ian

McSweeney and others will look into the categories on the two maps. Clarification of soil categories is necessary before we decide which map is to be our authority.

George Malette pointed out that the statutes allow us to have developers do biological and soils studies to determine land use. He wanted the committee to make the process the least complex it can be, by asking for a soils study or determining whether there has been past agricultural activity on the property. Hague pointed out that some properties are former farms that have become second growth woodland.

The committee suggested incentives to protect farm land. Malette suggested adding to cluster development language in the zoning handbook to determine incentives for preserving agricultural lands. Language will be a topic at the next meeting.

Gordon said she would continue making a list of landowners, and suggested inviting them to the committee meetings. Hague wanted to clarify what the committee's purpose is before doing this. Mike Koski pointed out that interested people would self-identify if we make our activities well-known and include input as an objective.

The committee then turned to a draft mission statement. In preparing this statement, members agreed upon a definition of agriculture offered by Ruth Jones:
Agriculture: The science and art of the production of plants and animals useful to man, including the preparation of these products for man's use and their disposal by marketing or otherwise.

The next point of discussion was the committee name, which was moved and voted to be the Agriculture Committee. In the discussion of the mission it was agreed that the mission is a broad statement, with more specific objectives that accompany it. Objectives are set for a finite period of time and evaluated regularly to see if the committee is on target. The committee drafted this document:

Weare NH Planning Board Sub-Committee, Agriculture Committee Mission Statement (draft)

The mission of the Agriculture Committee (AC) is to protect and conserve agricultural land and to enhance the practice of agriculture in the Town of Weare.

To execute this mission:

1. The AC will identify agricultural lands, based upon the following criteria;
 - Prime soils and soils of local and state importance
 - Large tracts of undeveloped land
 - Land currently used for agricultural purposesThe owners will be contacted and encouraged to share their needs and wants as landowners and as farmers.
2. The AC will create a general statement, to be submitted as a warrant article, that the town supports the practice of agriculture in Weare and endorses the state's Right to Farming law.
3. The AC will make recommendations to the Planning Board on regulations and incentives to make development on agricultural lands farm-friendly and to encourage the preservation of prime soils, and soils of local and state importance.
4. The AC will instate a plan for a long-term, permanent agriculture commission.

5. The AC will investigate the establishment of a fund to (?) raise money to purchase and preserve farm land.
 6. The AC will work with the Conservation Commission and Open Space Committee and other town committees and boards to develop language for conservation easements that would promote the practice of agriculture in Weare and to work with potential land owners to support our mission.
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The meeting closed with a review of what we would bring to the Planning Board meeting on July 12. Discussion of a later meeting hour did not result in any changes at this time. The next meeting will be at 5 PM on Tuesday July 17, 2007 in the Sawyer Room at the library.

Meeting adjourned at 6:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Christine Hague